

Black Box
By Lorraine Viade, PsyD



Black Box is a new television series on ABC that does for bi-polar disorder what *Perception* does for schizophrenia. It gives the audience a sense of what it is like to have the disorder. Granted, both shows involve brilliant neurologists who have extensively studied the human brain and who are expert at detecting what might be wrong with someone else. *Black Box* brings a lot of interpersonal drama to the mix as we see Catherine Black, a dedicated neurologist who struggles minute-by-minute with her own disorder. Her ups and downs are extreme and she deals with her demons, her secrets, her relationships and with her choices in managing them.

What I like about this show is that it offers us a glimpse into her brilliance and her madness. When in the grip of an episode, Black is grandiose, delusional, self-destructive and out-of-control. When on her medication she is perceptive, sensitive and can connect to her patients in ways that many others could not. She fearlessly confronts behaviors that she is familiar with and is willing to be an anchor of sanity for those who are in the grip of impairment. The implication is that she is able to figure things out because she is also afflicted, not merely in spite of it.

Black has family members who know her history and who have witnessed her at her worst. I like that she has a significant other who is willing to love her and accepts her without reservation. The show also acknowledges the genetic and familial patterns that are contained in her family and how they have sacrificed for her and with her. It is a true warts and all depiction. *Black Box* is a good way for anyone to better understand not just the symptoms and behaviors, but the impact on work, family and loved ones from both sides.

The more I watch, the more I like what I see. Many media portrayals of people with mental disorders are one-sided or stereotypes that don't offer the same level of respect and truth that *Black Box* does. Of course, as with all entertainment television, there are things that are not likely to happen in real life. *Black Box* isn't doing well in the ratings, which is too bad. It might have done better on a different network. If you are free on Thursday night at 10:00PM, you might want to stop by and check it out. I give *Black Box* 4 brains.



